

THEATER REVIEW

Pair craftily unwind problems at Mews

By JEFFREY BRUNER
REGISTER THEATER CRITIC

A snowstorm rages in the Alaskan wilderness, but "Brilliant Traces" keeps nudging up the heat until the fog inside a small cabin starts to lift.

Shoshana Salowitz and Richie Gibbs deliver a pitch-perfect production of Cindy Lou Johnson's nuanced comedy-drama, which opened Thursday at the Vaudeville Mews.

This 90-minute, one-act play is filled with emotional peaks and valleys, but Salowitz and Gibbs keep the highs from going over the top and the lows from grinding the show to a halt.

Rosannah (Salowitz) is a bride - still in her dress and satin slippers - who has wandered into the middle of nowhere and stumbles into a cabin owned by Henry (Gibbs). What follows is talk therapy as two souls who are lost - on several levels - help each other recover from deep wounds that have driven them into the wilderness.

"People," Henry notes, "they're the wild cards. So I steer clear of them."

Johnson's play patiently unfolds as Rosannah and Henry uncover what has led them to the middle of nowhere, cleverly balancing wit and drama while building to a literal leap of faith for these two strangers. The minor flaw in the work is that it detours into a subplot about physical attraction

that never quite connects with the more substantive issues that Henry and Rosannah are seeking to resolve.

The set design is Spartan but appropriate for a single man living in the Alaskan woods. (Henry's cupboard, however, is a bit barren for someone who works as a cook.) The evening's other glitch was an erratic sound effect for the raging snowstorm, which put the first few minutes on uneven footing.

Salowitz and Gibbs, however, were sure-footed from the start, from their comic timing to the unloading of the dramatic payoffs sprinkled throughout the work that slowly explains these damaged characters to the audience as well as each other.

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Details

WHAT: "Brilliant Traces"

WHERE: Vaudeville Mews, 212 Fourth St.

CURTAIN: 7 p.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday – April 21-23; 3 p.m. April 24.

TICKETS: \$9 in advance or \$12 at the door, available through iowatix.com.

LENGTH: 1 hour, 30 minutes

AUDIENCE: PG-13 for language, subject matter.